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AUTHOR Railsback, Jennifer; Reed, Bracken; Boss, Suzie
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ABSTRACT

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory asked state department of education staff members of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana to recommend Title I schools that had made significant improvement in student achievement. The Title I schools have schoolwide or targeted assistance and vary in size, grade configuration, diversity, and percentage of low-income students. The turnaround of the 12 schools is profiled, with an address and a contact person provided for each. Then follows a section discussing effective strategies shared by these schools and the supporting research. While specifics of reform may vary, research shows that it is an ongoing process of determining goals and benchmarks by conducting needs assessments, using data to guide decision-making, aligning goals for student performance with state and local standards, and evaluating results to fine-tune reform strategies. There is a shared vision of excellence and equity, with students and staff engaged in learning. Adequate resources, a positive school climate, and effective collaborative leadership prevail. Parent and community involvement is welcome, and decision-making is based on data. School leaders play a critical role, and districts can support school reform by investing in professional development of principals in creating a collaborative culture of continuous learning and improvement. (Contains 21 references.) (RKJ)

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By Request...

PROFILES OF PROGRESS

What Works in Northwest Title I Schools

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What Works in Northwest Title I Schools

JENNIFER RAILSBACK
PLANNING & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

BRACKEN REED
COMPREHENSIVE CENTER, REGION X

SUZIE BOSS
DEVELOPMENT & COMMUNICATIONS

SEPTEMBER 2001

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FOREWORD

This booklet is the eighteenth in a series of "hot topics" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators from around the Northwest are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

This issue is a collaborative project between the Comprehensive Center and Planning and Program Development's Education Resource Specialist.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2000, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory published the results of its annual regional needs assessment. Demographic trends were identified that are likely to have a profound effect on teaching and learning in Northwest schools. Two of the most significant trends are a rapidly increasing diversity in the student population and the uneven distribution and concentrations of poverty (Barnett & Greenough, 2000).

Researchers have devoted considerable attention to how diversity and poverty affect student achievement. Research-based school reform efforts have focused specifically on improving results for low-performing schools with large concentrations of high-poverty students. This research has shown that ad hoc, piecemeal approaches to school reform often fail to provide sustained, schoolwide improvement for these students. In contrast, comprehensive school reform strategies help create high-performing learning communities that raise student achievement.

A survey of recent school reform literature (listed in Resources and References) shows that researchers generally agree on what has turned around low-performing schools. Studies vary in emphasis and scope, and researchers may organize or articulate their conclusions in different ways. Despite these variations, researchers typically cite similar conditions occurring in these schools, including:

- Shared vision of excellence and equity
- Students and staff engaged in learning
- Positive, safe school climate
- Effective, collaborative school leadership
- Adequate resources

▲ Decisionmaking based on data and research
▲ Parent and community involvement

In broad strokes, these conditions outline what works to improve achievement results. Educators wanting to put research into practice are also looking for guidance on how to do what works in their schools. In particular, educators want models of successful schools that mirror their own populations and reflect the challenges facing their local communities. Much can be learned from once low-performing schools that have made progress in their comprehensive school reform efforts, especially if their stories are told in a way that resonates with other schools.

To obtain a Northwest perspective on school reform that is informed by both research and practice, NWREL's Comprehensive Center and the educational resources staff combined efforts to showcase Title I schools (schools with above average percentages of low-income students) that have made significant progress toward improving student achievement. Our goal is to spotlight and celebrate the schools' successful comprehensive school reform efforts and share those efforts with other schools that may be facing similar challenges. In doing so, we also hope to add practical insights to the existing school reform literature, providing a regional perspective to school improvement.

We selected the schools by asking state department of education staff members from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming to recommend Title I schools (both schoolwide and targeted assistance) that have made significant progress in improving student achievement and performance during the last three years. While these schools vary in size,

grade configuration, low-income percentage, diversity, location, rate of improvement and method of improvement, they all have in common a structure and direction for their school improvements efforts that have been crucial to their success.

Laboratory staff members contacted school administrators at each site to ask what their school community has done to achieve success. Although our questions were shaped by previous research on what works in turning schools around, our goal was not to confirm previous research but to build on it. Thus, we also looked for any approaches or strategies that may be uniquely suited to the Northwest region. We asked to see schoolwide plans, goal statements, achievement data, and any other information that would give us a broader picture of each school. Our staff members were able to visit some of the schools to interview administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Thus, some of the profiles also include observations and comments gathered during site visits.

After the profiles, we discuss seven strategies for school reform that we discovered during our investigation of successful Title I schools in the Northwest region. Not surprisingly, many of these strategies relate to what previous researchers have concluded about the conditions commonly found in high-performing, high-poverty schools. Our discussion uses specific examples and practical insights from Northwest schools to illustrate how these strategies have been used. Implications for policymakers to support these efforts conclude this booklet.

We hope that educators, parents, community members, and policymakers will benefit from these schools' experiences to learn how they can focus efforts to achieve similar successes.

SCHOOL PROFILES

LOCATION

Glacier Valley Elementary School (pre-K–5)
10014 Crazy Horse Drive
Juneau, AK 99801-8529

CONTACT

Bernie Sorenson, Principal
Phone: (907) 463-1801
E-mail: sorensob@mail.jsd.k12.ak.us
Web site: www.jsd.k12.ak.us/gv/index.html

DESCRIPTION

Glacier Valley, one of six elementary schools in Juneau, has a diverse student body. Of the 380 students, 46 percent are minority, mostly Alaska Native, and 38 percent are English language learners.

When Principal Bernie Sorenson came to Glacier Valley four years ago, she saw a child-centered school where teachers were committed to their students. She noticed, however, that staff morale was low. Incoming kindergarten students showed a lack of readiness skills. Assessment data showed declining scores, with 50 percent of the children scoring below the 50th percentile. Additionally, many of the teachers, including the former principal, had moved to a newly formed school. Glacier Valley had 13 new teachers, with five brand-new to teaching.

Sorenson knew something had to be done about the staff's discouraged attitude. First, she had the staff look at the facts before coming up with solutions. She disaggregated the achievement data by ethnicity, gender, language group, grade level, socioeconomic status, and special education. Once the staff saw the data, they realized the situation was not so hopeless. Although it was apparent that focused school improvement was necessary, the disaggregation showed that low-income students were not doing as poorly as has been thought. Furthermore, the Alaska Native students were doing better than at any other school in the district. These facts gave the staff a more positive attitude and made them wonder what they could do better. The data showed the school needed to take a comprehensive, systemwide, and sustainable approach to change, rather than the ad hoc approach it had been taking.

The school's goal to achieve reform led it to apply for a Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grant. After looking at needs assessment data, student achievement data, and the school's goal to achieve sustainable, systemwide change, the staff chose the Annenberg Institute for School Reform model as a framework to implement reform strategies. The goals were to rethink accountability, engage the public, and build capacity.

The accountability strand emphasizes using tools to improve accountability for student assessment and outcomes. An integrated standards-based curriculum has been adopted that has developed clear definitions of standards and student outcomes. Data are used to help drive instruction. Specific state and local indicators are used to analyze and track test scores and other measures of student success.

Assessment scores have gone up remarkably in the last three years: 79 percent of fourth-grade students met or exceeded the CAT 5 requirements for reading and writing in 2000, compared with 50 percent in 1998. Progress was made in increasing the percentage of students meeting or exceeding math goals—84 percent of kindergarten and first-grade students met or exceeded grade level expectations in 2000, compared with 60 percent three years earlier.

Engaging the public, especially families, has been a major success. Sorenson has seen family involvement grow significantly. "Parents are not afraid to come in the door now," she says. The school hired a parent, Veronica Whitehead, to be parent-volunteer coordinator. She coordinates the school newsletter development, truly a newsletter by and for the children, as well as parents. The school's Web site has a form with which parents, students, and teachers can submit ideas for stories.

Parents, volunteers, paraeducators, and teachers meet in the teachers' lounge to eat, share, and work together. The lounge is a dynamic area of activity and collegiality. Many of the volunteers don't wear volunteer badges; they just blend in with the rest of the staff.

A major success in involving parents has been the Art Tuesday classes taught by parent volunteers every week. These classes have created a more collegial atmosphere between parents and teachers. Parents are not only welcomed as educators, they are empowered to act as professionals. One parent was unsure about her ability to teach, especially having to maintain discipline. Sorenson assured her it was the principal's responsibility to maintain disci-

pline. The parent became more confident in her teaching ability.

The Art Tuesday classes also give teachers in the Collaborative Friends Group (CFG) time to meet twice a month. CFG gives the staff an outlet to think about more productive teaching practices, examine curriculum and student work, and identify school culture issues that affect student achievement. This group is at the heart of developing the capacity of teachers to engage in reflective dialogue, give each other feedback, and hold each other accountable.

Parent involvement strategies are working: 98 percent of parents now attend parent-teacher conferences. Participation at family/community nights has nearly doubled in the past year. The parents attend knowing they will see their kids demonstrating their work through performances, says Brett Dillingham, a long-time school community member and technical assistance provider from the Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center. The performances also promote a greater sense of community, letting parents see other parents. Dillingham visits Glacier Valley often to work with children on developing their presentation abilities. "When the children know they will be publishing or displaying their work, they are motivated to do their best," says Dillingham.

The students are taking ownership of their learning, and of the school itself—it is *their* assembly, *their* performance, *their* newsletter, and *their* school.

The culture of this school is one of support, collegiality, and respect. When asked about changes she has seen during the

school improvement process, one teacher said, "Everyone has the freedom to learn from each other and share each other's knowledge." "There is a strong sense of community here," said another teacher.

Certainly the road has not always been easy. The staff members indicated in a survey that they wished they had more time—time for training on model strategies; time for assessment development, and for collaboration to do so; time to process what they've learned; time to get everything done. Overall, however, the staff remains supportive of the process. They emphasize that the principal's strong leadership and commitment to staff professional development has made the difference. Said one respondent in the survey, "We have a very supportive principal who mentors, encourages, and models new educational processes." The framework of the model, although time-consuming to implement at times, has made staff members work together toward the same goals.

The staff's dedication carries over to the well-being of students. A visitor asked two students working together in the hallway what they liked best about their school. One girl said, "You know the teachers really support you here. They are like family." The other girl replied, "No, they *are* family." That says it all.

Location

Hoonah Elementary and High School (pre-K–6, and 7–12)
P.O. Box 157
Hoonah, AK 99829

Contact

Howard Diamond, Superintendent
Phone: (907) 945-3611
E-mail: howarddiamond@yahoo.com
Web site: www.hcs.k12.ak.us/

Description

Hoonah is a small fishing community on Chichagof Island, 40 miles from Juneau. Hoonah's elementary school and high school each have more than 100 students. Seventy-seven percent are Alaska Native. Sixty-four percent of the elementary school students and 56 percent of the high school students are from low-income families.

Howard Diamond completed his first year as Hoonah's principal in spring 2001, and is now school superintendent. When we asked what makes being an educator at Hoonah unique, he reflected: "One thread that has run through my 20-plus years in Alaska is that culture plays an important role in schooling. In schools that have a strong cultural influence in their curriculum, including elder participation and knowledge, you see a high level of self-esteem in the children."

The infusion of culture here is significant in children's learning. Native culture is built into lessons tied to every performance standard. Native-based literature is used whenever

possible. Classes in the Tlingit language are taught as a requirement in the elementary grades, with an elder, Grandma Bea, as the children's dialect coach. Tlingit is offered as an elective for high school students, and they then teach kindergarten students Tlingit vocabulary.

Passing on wisdom from generation to generation is very much a part of the Tlingit culture, and the culture of Hoonah Schools. This was celebrated and symbolized by a significant community event, for which dignitaries flew in from all over Alaska. In April 2001, two totem poles were dedicated in a "pole raising." High school students in Gordon Greenwald's Northwest Coast Art Class carved these eight-foot-tall eagle and raven totems over a three-year period. The eagle and raven, the main Tlingit clans, sit on boxes of wisdom they pass on to their children. Not only was this project a celebration of culture and a symbol of transfer of wisdom, but it was a collaborative learning activity that crossed disciplines and grades to be a truly meaningful representation of student work.

The annual spring potlatch is another communitywide celebration of the Tlingit culture and language, as well as student achievement. Students spend the whole year designing and making their own regalia. Every class participates: the kindergartners perform "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes"; the fourth-graders recite the Pledge of Allegiance in Tlingit; and the fifth-graders do self-introductions in Tlingit.

Culturally congruent curriculum and celebration of learning are two reasons for a successful learning environment. Another is aligning the curriculum to state and district standards, which has been a major factor in student improve-

ment. In 1999, when the goal for curriculum alignment was set, the administration received unanimous agreement from the staff. Teacher accountability and buy-in has been important to the success of curriculum alignment. The district developed its own grade-specific standards before the state did, adopting standards specific to each grade level.

The strategies staff members use for successfully implementing curriculum alignment include documenting what standards are taught in weekly lesson plans, continuously reviewing test data, utilizing technology in planning and instructional delivery, and developing portfolio assessments for all grades. Hoonah provides the staff development training for implementing portfolios and using technology.

A vocational standards curriculum for high school students that cross-references language arts and mathematics with vocational educational classes has been implemented. The school-to-work program enables high school students to get credit for working in the community, using their skills for a meaningful purpose. For example, students who work in the school's auto shop learn a skill that benefits their small community, which has few repair services.

Hoonah's administration listens to staff suggestions and gives staff members the resources and independence to experiment and implement their ideas. The staff is currently exploring how technology can be used for authentic, project-based, cooperative learning.

Tammy Halfacre, the kindergarten teacher, says the administration fully supports teacher involvement in decisionmaking. "When I first came here," remembers Halfacre, "there

was no consistent reading curriculum. The staff pushed to have one implemented."

It is no wonder that Hoonah proudly boasts it has the lowest school staff turnover in the state. Tremendous administration support is one reason; another is strong community support for the school and teachers. Former students such as Gordon Greenwald return to teach here for 20-plus years. The Preparing Indigenous Teachers for Alaskan Schools (PITAS) program has made it possible for other students to return to teach in their home community.

Aligning the curriculum with standards, having a supportive administration that encourages staff involvement in planning, and creating a positive, culturally congruent learning community have been factors in increasing student achievement and performance. Fourth-grade math scores in the top quartile improved from 19 percent in 1998 to 46.7 percent in 2000. School counselor Joe Digrande in his eight years at Hoonah has seen a remarkable trend in reduced absenteeism and tardiness. Students want to be at school and they are eager to learn. As Diamond says, "Our school is what 'inclusion' is meant to be—providing all our students, including ones with special needs, an across-the-board education."

Location

Sacajawea Elementary School (K–5)
1710 N. Illinois
Caldwell, ID 83605

Contact

Gary Johnston, Principal
Phone: (208) 455-3333
E-mail: GJohnston@sd132.k12.id.us
District Web site: www.sd132.k12.id.us/index.html

Description

Sacajawea Elementary School is one of four elementary schools in the Caldwell School District that has made reading a top priority. The K–5 school enrolls 565 students, of whom 52 percent are Hispanic, 30 percent are English language learners, and 65 percent qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

The motto for the district is "A Tradition of Excellence." Although the district has always worked toward academic excellence for all children, recently it began focusing school improvement efforts on reading. The district was spurred to action in 1999 by the development of the Idaho Reading Initiative, a statewide reading strategy mandating that every child K–3 be assessed at least two times a year, providing interventions for children not meeting grade level, and training for teachers in comprehensive literacy.

In 1998, reading scores showed that too many students were not reading at grade level. With the district providing the

resources, including training, all services and resources were coordinated to focus on the goal of bringing students to grade level.

Using an aligned curriculum has been a major factor in reaching this goal. Open Court Reading was implemented for K–5 grades. All staff, including paraeducators, are trained in the curriculum, making instruction more consistent. The same curriculum is used in the Title I and special education resource room. Says Principal Gary Johnston, "We are coordinating services with the specialists, so the kids make connections between their regular classroom instruction and their pull-out instruction."

Instruction and performance standards help ensure that the curriculum is aligned across and between grade levels. Reading, writing, and math plans have been established to make sure all staff are following the same guidelines.

Teachers use assessments to determine which students need individual reading plans (IRP) to help them in their learning. All students are tested in the fall and winter using the Idaho Reading Indicator (IRI), a 10-minute test. Some students may be tested again in the spring. Although the state initiative requires every low-performing third-grader to have an IRP, Sacajawea requires all students in grades 1–3 who scored below reading level to have IRPs developed for them. As Johnston says, "Why wait for third grade to start planning interventions for students?"

Teachers work together in teams to develop the plans. For the first time, teachers are able to see the results of the assessments and to use that information to tailor their teaching to

meet the students' needs. Having teachers directly involved in giving assessments, looking at the results, and using the results to develop plans for instruction has not only given teachers the tools and leadership to make curriculum decisions, but has also encouraged teachers to work together toward a common, focused goal. Johnston has given teachers time each week to meet with other teachers at their grade level. They share strategies and stories, and work together to help struggling students. Providing sustained professional development has really made a difference.

Reconfiguration of reading groups has been another successful strategy. All grade levels have 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading blocks during which no students are pulled out. During the reading blocks, all available staff members—Title I, special education, and paraeducators—work with students.

Another successful strategy has been extending the day for students who need it. If at the end of fall semester, kindergartners aren't up to grade-level reading, they can stay on for a full day, instead of a half day, spending half the time with a Title I teacher. Despite worries about how parents would react, not one parent objected to the plan. This extra time has made the difference. In fall of 2000, only 11 students were at grade level; by Spring 2001, 79 students were at or above grade level, and only one student below grade level.

Teachers are seeing the effects of coordinated curriculum and collaboration. Says one teacher: "Before, we didn't have a system to fill in the gaps in kids' reading skills. One first-grade teacher might teach reading one way, while another did it a different way... Now we are all using the same system ... it's smoother for them."

Encouraging as much parent participation as possible, Sacajawea holds an open house where all programs are explained to parents. Parents learn about the Title I program and how their children can benefit from extra help. Parents are always invited to visit in the classroom, volunteer to help, or participate in individual reading times.

Parents are also invited to schoolwide improvement meetings and are asked for input through improvement surveys that are later looked over by faculty and administrators. The schoolwide improvement committee continues to meet monthly to listen to parent ideas and feedback. Their feedback is taken seriously and plays a huge role in planning the future of Sacajawea Elementary.

Today, test scores are continuing to rise. In 2001, 87 percent of kindergartners are reading at grade level. With targeted, more articulated teaching, coordination of resources and services, involving all staff in achieving goals, and having full community support, Sacajawea is achieving excellence for its students.

Location

Taft Elementary School (K-6)
3722 Anderson St.
Boise, Idaho 83703

Contact

Susan Williamson, Principal
Phone: (208) 338-3508
E-mail: willis@taft3.sd01.k12.id.us
Web site: www.sd01.k12.id.us/schools/taft/

Description

William Howard Taft Elementary School is one of 35 elementary schools in the Boise Independent School District. Seventy percent of the students are on free and reduced-price lunch. High poverty is just one factor that affects children's ability to achieve. Says Principal Susan Williamson, other factors are children "being moved 2-3 times during one school year, having little or no educational stimuli in the home, and being the victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse."

While these factors are certainly daunting, Taft has made impressive gains in student achievement during the last three years. One reason has been Williamson's leadership. She has a vision of her school becoming a high-performing learning community, the commitment to provide the necessary support to staff members, and the knowledge base to guide the changes that must take place.

When Williamson first came to Taft three years ago, she found a very loving and nurturing school culture. She has

extended that culture to include a focus on improving academic achievement and creating a more respectful and responsible learning environment. Through horizontal and vertical team meetings, the staff became familiar with curriculum alignment, mastery learning, the use of data to drive instruction, the importance of disaggregating the data, and the use of assessment to drive instruction. Over time the majority of the staff have come to realize that they can have an impact on student achievement at a low-income school.

Williamson embraces an organizational model that provides momentum and expertise to improve student achievement. Previously, teachers were not taught or encouraged to look at data as a tool to help them with instruction. Now, teachers look at all kinds of data and use this information to inform what happens in the classroom.

Williamson views the transformation of Taft into a professional learning community as a continuous process that requires the development of an entirely new teaching and learning culture that focuses on significant research findings about best practices and strategies. Teachers, while they do not have all the answers, are in a better position than anyone else to research, formulate, and implement solutions of their own devising. "It is important that we learn to do right things, not just do things right!" Williamson emphasizes. "Research will guide the staff in the direction of 'right things.'"

A new paradigm of professional development is critical in the process of becoming a learning community. Training must support the school/district's long-term plan, include a needs assessment process, utilize different models to meet the needs of all staff members, and be embedded and ongoing. Staff members have attended numerous conferences and work-

shops on topics such as responding to diversity, results-driven school improvement, using assessment, and building effective learning communities. They have had the opportunity to listen to educational leaders such as Terrance Deal, Art Costa, and Margaret Wheatley. More than 80 percent of the staff will receive training in results-driven, continuous school improvement by October 2001. This information will be the focus of staff meetings facilitated by staff members. Teachers will continue to be encouraged to observe in each other's classrooms as the staff moves toward a collegial coaching model for instructional improvement. Opportunities to read and share current literature and best practices will be provided through a monthly "Breakfast Club."

District-level support is a necessary component for implementing change at the building level. Says Williamson, "District level support is crucial to the success of the school improvement process. Requiring accountability without addressing other issues such as equity, teacher/student ratios, and continuous professional development will result in 'just another reform effort'. I have been very fortunate to work with a group of district level administrators, board members, and community members who have developed a road map for excellence through our strategic planning process."

The results are impressive. Taft has improved third-grade math scores from the 42nd percentile in 1998 to 55th in 2000. Fourth-grade Direct Writing and Direct Math scores have moved from near the bottom of the 35 district elementary schools to the middle. Taft received the Idaho Education Association A+ Award for Excellence in Education in 2001. Taft has truly become a high-performing learning community.

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Location

Lake Labish Elementary (K-5)
7495 Portland Road, NE
Salem, OR 97305

Contact

Cameron Covey, Principal
Phone: (503) 399-3159
E-mail: covey_cameron@salkeiz.k12.or.us
Web site: www.salkeiz.k12.or.us/schools/elementary/lakeL.html

Description

Located off a country road in the farmlands outside Salem, Oregon, the tiny community of Labish Village was listed as the most racially diverse in the state in the recent U.S. Census. When NWREL last checked in with Lake Labish Elementary (Moores, 1999), they were in the first year of implementing a CSRD program. After two years, the results are obvious: test scores are up, attendance is up, and parent involvement has increased substantially. The school was recently listed among the most improved in the state by the Oregon Department of Education. What have they been doing right?

Cameron Covey, Principal at Lake Labish, credits the Success for All model with much, though not all, of their improvement. "One of the things that our kids in Title I need is consistency," she says. "The kids not only have inconsistency at home, they have it at school. With Success for All, everyone speaks a common language." One result, Covey notes, is that while she did not come to Lake Labish until the second year of the program, this administrative change did not cause a

disruption; because a consistent program was in place, the transition was smooth for all involved, including the students.

Success for All has provided assistance not only with specific skills, but also with attendance, behavior, family involvement, and creating a positive school climate. Such a comprehensive approach obviously requires a great deal of professional development. "So often people get handed all this new stuff," Covey says, "and yet they never have the time to process it. With Success for All, there is a large staff development component." The usual, all-day staff development days are supplemented with one early-release day a month for grade-level planning and inservice training. An onsite, half-time facilitator also provides assistance to staff.

The most obvious area of improvement has been in reading. Students are evaluated and then grouped according to ability levels. These mixed-age ability groups are also split into smaller groups for much of the 90-minute reading block. In addition, students who are a grade or more behind get another 20 minutes of tutoring each day. The students are evaluated every eight weeks and then regrouped.

This multi-age grouping process allows students to learn at their own pace without the competition and stigmatizing often associated with reading programs, while the frequent evaluations ensure that they can move up as soon as they are ready. Because this process is the same in every classroom, at every grade level, the students accept it as normal, and are able to move from level to level without feeling lost. Covey also emphasizes Success for All's ESL component as a critical part of the school's success: "It really does help kids who are emergent in language and emergent in reading."

Another critical component of the Success for All model is the Family Support Team. Along with a full-time, bilingual, School-Community Outreach Coordinator, the Support Team has helped educate the community about the reforms taking place and has increased the number of volunteers at the school. Positive reinforcement programs, such as a Sunshine Club for those having attendance problems, and a Good News Referral program in which students get awards and their picture on the school bulletin board for exhibiting positive social skills, have helped create a culture of support and inclusion. Other programs, such as Bingo for Books, Family Fun Nights, and monthly awards assemblies have also increased parent involvement and helped keep attendance consistently higher than 90 percent. Free morning breakfasts, health fairs, and other services provided by the state Child Health Initiative department have also encouraged family support.

By committing to a reconfigured schedule, and by using all available staff and funding resources toward the implementation of a single, comprehensive set of guidelines, the school has been able to realize significant progress in a relatively short time.

While some have criticized Success for All for its very structured, prescriptive approach, it has been a good match for Lake Labish. "It is prescriptive," say Covey, "but once you've taught it for a while, there is more latitude. They really want you adhering to it before you take off in other directions. There was some resistance to it initially, but as the teachers saw the changes coming about, they were all for it." The key to making a Comprehensive School Reform model work, she notes, is to do the proper research, find the right model for your school, and gain consensus before setting out. As for the long-term sustainability, Covey says, "We really hope to continue on with this. If we can continue to have the funding to buy the materials, I think we have the foundation to build on."

Location

Portsmouth Middle School (6-8)
5103 N. Willis Blvd.
Portland, OR 97203

Contact

Tom Pickett, Principal
Phone: (503) 916-5666
E-mail: tpickett@pps.k12.or.us
District Web site: www.pps.k12.or.us/

Description

The only middle school in our study, Portsmouth is also unique in its approach to school reform. Located in an urban, low-income, racially diverse area, the school has seen its share of school reform efforts. Until recently, none of them has shown significant results. We talked with outgoing Principal Tom Pickett about what has made current, successful reform efforts different from those of the past.

Four years ago, school staff members attended a Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) conference in Bend, Oregon, and were introduced to the Baldrige Criteria, a business management method being applied to school reform efforts in several schools around the country. Part of Portland General Electric's education outreach program, Initiative for Quality in Education (IQE), the presentation soon led to a partnership between Portsmouth and PGE. "We had been looking at management approaches for several years," Pickett notes, "trying to find a way to unify the various programs we had in place."

What the Baldrige method identifies as "random acts of improvement" is exactly what Pickett saw happening at Portsmouth. "We had tried a lot of district programs, with varying success," he says, "but we had no unified vision. What we needed was a way to integrate those programs and to evaluate what was working and what wasn't."

Because of its origins in the business community, the Baldrige method contains some language and ideas that can initially seem foreign to educators. If you look beneath the surface, Pickett insists, the Baldrige Criteria are actually quite similar to other comprehensive school reform components.

Pickett describes Baldrige as "customer-focused and data-based," noting that in the case of education, your "customers" are students, parents, local and state policymakers, and anyone else with a significant investment in the public school system. As with a business, you let the customers tell you what they want and need, then you set your goals accordingly. "The state of Oregon has spoken very clearly about its priorities, through the state standards and local benchmarks," Pickett says.

With that in mind, Portsmouth narrowed its focus to three major goals:

- One hundred percent of students will demonstrate significant growth each year toward meeting or exceeding grade level expectations in reading, writing, and math
- Portsmouth will establish a schoolwide culture of excellence and respect
- The annual average daily attendance will increase 6 percent by 2001 in annual increments of 2 percent a year

The next step was what Pickett calls "lining up the arrows." By focusing all school resources on the same set of goals, Portsmouth was able to turn "random acts of improvement" into a schoolwide, cohesive set of "aligned acts of improvement." For Pickett, this involves every aspect of the building, whether considering how to use professional development funds, dealing with discipline issues, looking at building maintenance needs, or making lesson plans.

By being "data-driven," Pickett says, you stay focused on your goals and keep all resources pointing in the same direction. "With Baldrige, success is measured by how well you are performing toward your goals. The data tell you how you're doing and whether something is contributing or not. If it's not, you change it. The data drive you where you need to go."

One example of this intense focus is Portsmouth's approach to parent involvement. Because all activities under the Baldrige Criteria are aligned to goals, the only parent activities are those that directly support student achievement of those goals. "There are no random acts of parent involvement," Pickett says. Typical activities would be a parent and staff member spending an hour with a student, discussing a report card in detail and making specific plans for what the family can do to ensure student improvement.

Another example of Portsmouth's alignment toward goals is the school's approach to professional development. Pickett asked the district to provide resources, and to hold him accountable for results, but to allow the school a greater flexibility than normal. Rather than attend scheduled district training sessions, Portsmouth has frequently used district money for school-specific training that addresses their needs more directly.

In the same spirit, the school has eliminated several programs, including some pull-out programs, that could not demonstrate data-proven results, or show how they aligned with the overall goals. They have also redesigned their report card to be aligned with content standards, restructured the school year into a quarterly system that allows for more frequent assessments, and given teachers a larger role in determining what works and what doesn't. "You've got to trust your teachers' professional judgment," Pickett says. "The Baldrige method is not prescriptive—that's what's great about it. It doesn't tell you how to teach or even what to teach, but it helps you make the right decisions based on accurate data." The staff at Portsmouth has proven equal to the task, taking greater responsibility for curriculum decisions and being open to change whenever the data show it is necessary. The intensely focused, streamlined nature of the Baldrige Criteria has actually resulted in greater freedom and flexibility for teachers, and a more individualized approach for their students.

In an era of increased accountability, with the emphasis on meeting state standards, Portsmouth has met the challenge. The school has seen significant improvement in all goal areas since implementing the Baldrige Criteria. By integrating and aligning all school reform efforts toward a clearly defined set of goals, they have achieved success and built a solid foundation for continued improvement. Always blessed with a committed, highly qualified staff and creative, intelligent students, Portsmouth has implemented the Baldrige method to focus those talents in the most effective ways.

Location

Bryant Elementary School (K–5)
1529 Boulder Ave.
Helena, MT 59601

Contact

Russ Van Hook, Principal
Phone: (406) 447-8895
E-mail: rvanhook@helena.k12.mt.us
Web site: www.is.helena.k12.mt.us/Bryant/

Description

Bryant Elementary is a national Title I Distinguished School located at the center of Helena's largest public housing neighborhood. With an average mobility rate of 40 percent, and 65 percent of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, the school has seen a remarkable turnaround in what remains a challenging environment.

Prior to 1996, test scores were consistently low. Despite a dedicated staff and strong district and state support, improvement had been minimal. "We were using a scattered approach," says Principal Russ Van Hook. "We had been using a lot of the districtwide programs, but we needed to narrow our focus." The school applied for Title I schoolwide funds and began to look at ways to unify all their resources and programs toward a common set of goals.

As the first step in the schoolwide process, a comprehensive needs assessment was completed. The school looked at programs already in place, using data to determine which had been

the most effective. A national academic mentoring program, Help One Student To Succeed (HOSTS), had proven effective for several years. Used initially in the area of reading, HOSTS involves parent and community volunteers working one-on-one with students needing extra help. Because of its structured, consistent approach, and variety of lesson plans, volunteers spend less time in training and are able to have an immediate impact.

Another successful program the school retained was a "looping track" for the first and second grades, allowing teachers to stay with the same class for two years. This has significantly cut down on the "getting to know each other" time for teachers, parents, and students, and has allowed teachers to focus on each student's individual learning style.

As a result of the needs assessment, the school decided to focus on improving reading levels. The Accelerated Reader program was chosen and implemented, along with Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) time at all grade levels. Accelerated Reader provided the school with professional development, access to a large database of books for every reading level, and Star Reading software for frequent, accurate evaluations.

Parent and community involvement was another goal identified in the needs assessment. A parent involvement program specifically targeted for kindergarten and first grade was piloted, and a parent center with books and videos was developed. Around the same time, the school received the donation of a Book Mobile, which has become a central part of the school's community outreach. Three nights a week, during the summer, the Bryant Book Mobile travels throughout the area, providing reading materials for all age levels, including a parent section. Every book is color-coded for the appropriate reading level, using Accelerated Reader, and Star Reading assessments

are available to keep track of each student's progress. To keep the program fun, points are awarded for each book read, students receive cookies, and there is a display board with each participants' picture and a list of their accomplishments. The Book Mobile has been a major success, with an average of 50 books checked out for each trip and an enthusiastic response from both parents and children.

Another important event that encourages parent and community involvement is the "Original Opera" that is put on each spring. Students write, compose, act, and do the stage work under the supervision of staff and volunteers. The performance has become a major annual event and a source of pride for the community.

With new programs in place, and the continuation of the most successful existing programs, the school showed positive results during the following school year, but still showed math scores well below the district average. When the CSRD project was introduced in 1998, Bryant Elementary was identified as a potential recipient. Members of the faculty attended a CSRD conference in Spokane, Washington, and then reviewed the material with the entire staff. Because of the schoolwide process already in place, the school chose Effective Schools, a model that helps schools develop a unified set of goals and strategies, without determining curriculum.

For the first year of the grant, Bryant worked on implementing this model. Lisa Carter, of Effective Schools, worked with the entire staff to develop five main areas of importance:
1. Frequent Monitoring
2. Clear and Focused Mission and High Expectations
3. Instructional Leadership and Opportunity To Learn
4. Safe, Orderly, and Respectful Environment

5. Home-School Community Relationships

Each of these correlates developed a group of teams and a set of objectives, with three major goals serving as the central focus: increasing parent involvement, improving reading and math scores, and creating a safer environment. Each team (such as the Opportunity To Learn team and the Building Leadership team) reports back to the entire staff, making recommendations and providing professional development. This organizational model had an immediate effect.

One example is the Home-School Community team, which worked to increase parent involvement by developing an after-school Homework Help Time, Lunch and Learn activities, Parent Education classes, and increased Summer Enhancement programs.

The Instructional Leadership team, given the responsibility to research and develop programs for math and reading improvement, helped choose the Reading Recovery program for first grade students needing more one-on-one help. The implementation of Reading Recovery became the major focus of the second grant year, while the third grant year focused on the development of a HOSTS program for math, and the vertical alignment of both math and reading levels.

Since 1996, Bryant Elementary has seen a steady improvement in student test scores, and in the level of parent and community involvement. The changes have not happened overnight, but only through a persistent, step-by-step process, which has built the foundation for continued success.

Location

Pablo Elementary School (K–5)
608 4th Avenue
Ronan, MT 59855

Contact

Andrea Johnson, Principal
Phone: (406) 676-3390 ext. 3700
E-mail: Ajohnson@ronan.k12.edu
Web site: www.ronan.net/~rsd30/pabloelementar/Default.htm

Description

Pablo Elementary School is located on the Flathead Reservation in Western Montana. Of the 292 students, approximately 70 percent are American Indian, 27 percent are English language learners, and 66.4 percent are enrolled in the free and reduced-price lunch program.

Pablo has spent several years developing a focused, comprehensive schoolwide reform process. In 1997–1998, the district started a strategic planning process, with a strategic plan written with input from community members. In 1998–1999, Pablo was awarded a CSRD grant to adopt effective, research-based comprehensive school reform. A building-level leadership team was formed to begin the schoolwide planning process. The "BLT" represented professional and paraprofessional staff members, parents, and community members as well as the principal.

The team led the entire school staff in conducting a comprehensive needs assessment. Committees were formed to col-

lect data on student achievement, school climate, curriculum and instruction, and parental involvement. The committees presented their findings at a public meeting and obtained feedback. Strategic planning participants and the building leadership team wrote needs statements based on these data.

The three most important goals that emerged from the process were to increase student achievement in reading, mathematics, and language arts; to increase students' social skills so they can resolve conflicts nonviolently; and to increase student attendance.

After visiting school sites and asking questions about school climate, student achievement, and attendance, the team took the information back to the elementary staff. Several models were researched, and the entire staff voted on which model to implement. Success for All was selected because it addressed all three goals of increasing student achievement, social skills, and student attendance. Having the staff involved throughout the needs assessment, planning, model adoption strategies, and data analysis was crucial to obtaining the buy-in necessary for the whole process to work.

Pablo has used multiple strategies to meet the first goal: increasing student achievement. Assessment data are used every eight weeks throughout the year to determine reading group placement. To obtain smaller reading classes, all specialists as well as the reading teachers teach a reading group. Students who are not up to grade level are given one-on-one tutoring. Individual plans are designed for these students and progress is carefully monitored.

Parents play a big part in their students reaching achievement goals. A schoolwide reading incentive program supports outside reading. Children are expected to read 20 minutes a day, four days a week. Parents receive training so they can help their children complete homework. Homework completion is up this year from the first year, with 85 percent of the children completing at least 80 percent of their homework.

Pablo has moved off the state's "Needs Improvement List" after two years of test scores above the 45th percentile. Students are showing increased growth at all levels, at all quartiles. More students are reading at grade level. Just one example is the improvement in fourth-grade reading scores from 50 percent of students meeting proficiency standards in 1999 to 80 percent in 2001.

Goal number two focuses on attendance. Schoolwide attendance was 78 percent in 1998. Pablo's goal is to get it up to 95 percent. The half-time social worker and full-time counselor work with the family support team to monitor and troubleshoot attendance. The Ronan Business Committee and Ronan/Pablo Indian Education Committee sponsor awards each month for students meeting the 95 percent attendance goal. Family activities reward the entire family of students who reach the goal.

The strategies have worked—in 1999–2000 attendance jumped to 92 percent. And in 2000–2001 attendance reached an all-time high of 93 percent.

Goal three is to reduce incidents of aggression by increasing students' social skills. Students are taught specific strategies for cooling down and talking through problems. The coun-

selor goes into classrooms regularly to reinforce conflict resolution strategies. "Children are taught what active listening is, how to help and encourage each other, that everyone participates, how to explain their ideas and tell why, as well as to complete tasks," says Johnson.

These strategies have resulted in the number of incidents of aggression decreasing from 153 in 1998 to 56 in 2001. The number of referrals has also decreased.

Making sure the staff was 100 percent involved in training in the model was critical and necessary. All staff members (including speech pathologists, the school nurse, counselors, paraeducators, and teacher specialists) were involved in the initial model training. Both teachers and paraeducators are paid for additional hours worked. Says Johnson: "We found that professional development is more effective when a strategy is taught, reviewed, enhanced, and revisited. If we only just 'teach' the strategy, effective implementation is not systemic." Systemic professional development creates and supports ownership.

Celebrations of success are important to the school culture. Pablo invites the entire community to schoolwide attendance celebrations. During the "May Attendance Blitz," in which the 95 percent attendance goal was promoted, there were daily visits by the family support teams to cheer the classes on, banners and signs posted announcing attendance records for the day, and award presentations in an all-school assembly.

Technical assistance from the model providers and other agencies has been a critical part of keeping up positive

momentum. Having a full-time facilitator devoted to instructional improvement and model implementation was also key to maintaining enthusiasm. "Having outside resources come to our site and report to us on our strengths as well as further areas of growth was absolutely necessary. It helped us keep our focus and not get lost in the forest," Johnson notes.

Technology has played a critical role in helping the staff access data on attendance, discipline, and achievement. "Being able to show staff, parents, and students data daily, regularly, and frequently has helped us keep the goal in the forefront, and our progress toward it visible," says Johnson. The district also has a database where student grades, test scores, attendance, activities, and so forth can be accessed. Data can be disaggregated and compared more readily than before. Johnson indicated that data helped drive reform. "It was an intense wake-up call. We recognized that we were not meeting student needs satisfactorily."

Having enough time has been a factor in successful school improvement, acknowledges Johnson. "Time within the workday for staff to plan, assess, evaluate, collect data, support each other, and have collegial dialogue regarding model implementation has continued to be a challenge."

A committed, energetic staff has made the difference at Pablo. The CSRD grant may end, but the groundwork has been laid to carry on with strategies for success. Johnson is optimistic, saying, "Most important, we are learning to be relentless in making sure we are doing everything to increase student achievement."

Location

Grant Elementary School (K-6)
1300 E. 9th Avenue
Spokane, WA 99205

Contact

Steven Indgjerd, Principal
Phone: (509) 354-2800
E-mail: Steven1@sd81.k12.wa.us
Web site: www.sd81.k12.wa.us/

Description

Grant Elementary School is one of 35 elementary schools in the Spokane School District. Known as one of the most diverse schools in the state, Grant enrolls students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including African American, Vietnamese, Hmong, Russian, Afghani, Ukrainian, Chinese, and Hispanic. Of the 580 enrolled students, 84 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and 45 percent are highly mobile.

In 1994, administrators and staff members conducted a needs assessment. They learned that although the school had an attendance rate of 94 percent, an active though small volunteer program, and strong staff dedication, it suffered from low academic standards, inconsistent program goals, lack of parent and community involvement, and insufficient enrichment programs. Based on this information, administrators and staff identified several priority goals to improve student achievement and schoolwide behavior, and increase parent involvement.

One of the most successful strategies to increase student achievement has been the implementation of individualized schoolwide assessments, which has allowed teachers to focus their instruction on student needs more intentionally. An emphasis has been placed on a comprehensive plan, which includes interactive writing, literacy centers, shared and guided reading, and journal writing. Upper grades focus on comprehension and literacy circles.

For math, the main strategy has been a consistent curriculum for all grades coordinated by a math specialist. It focuses on computation, patterns, moving from concrete to the abstract, and writing in math, in an effort to continue to improve the students' performance on the state achievement test. The math specialist works collaboratively with teachers researching best practices, modeling lessons, serving as a coach, and helping to develop a program that the teachers believe in and the children enjoy.

Teachers can experiment with different classroom structures, including looping with their students. By teaching the same students for two years instead of one, teachers get to know the children better, including their habits, strengths and weaknesses, and what they need when they move on to the next level. It also allows teachers to develop curriculum and teaching strategies at more than one grade level, making them more aware of addressing a wide variety of student needs.

From this schoolwide planning process came the idea that the entire staff could take part in the decisionmaking process. The principal and staff categorized what kinds of

decisions are continually made, which decisions the principal should make, and which decisions the staff should make. Committees have been formed in the areas of instruction, technology, behavior, equity, and parent involvement. Each committee researches and develops programs in its area of expertise. Proposals are then presented to the entire staff for a consensus vote. A 75 percent majority vote is required to put any idea into action.

The principal has encouraged teacher collaboration while providing teachers with flexibility to do what they think is best for their students. Teachers meet regularly to discuss the best methods of teaching, while each teacher fine-tunes his or her teaching style to fit their respective students.

An emphasis has also been put on extending the school year, both after school and in the summer. This was in response to students expressing a need for extra activities that were interesting and offered them a safe environment in which to work with other students after school. Clubs and programs were also started in response to student needs.

The Technology Club enables fifth- and sixth-graders to receive training in the use of digital cameras, scanners, and computers, and word processing and drawing programs. The Chess Club has turned out to be one of the most popular clubs, averaging an attendance of more than 40 students an afternoon. The Drummers and Dancers Club, designed for students in grades four to six, teaches African dancing.

Getting parents involved has been an important part of improving test scores. The school has gone to great lengths to ensure that parents know about everything going on in

their child's life. Kindergarten teachers visit with each of their students' families before classes start in the fall. Parents are encouraged to volunteer as much as possible, and to ask questions about their child's development. Administrators have found that parents are more interested when they are learning along with their children, not just sitting and listening. Currently, more than 200 volunteers are working in the school, along with 35 mentors from corporate partnerships who are teamed one-on-one with students.

Results have been impressive. In 1997 only 26 percent of Grant students passed the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading. In 1999, proficiency rose to 46 percent, and the school met the reading accountability goal set by the state for the year 2001. Students surpassed the goal in 2000 when 55 percent of students passed the reading assessment. Also in 1999, Grant fourth-graders topped the district in the math portion of the CTBS. It was the first time in eight years that a high-poverty school outperformed other schools in Spokane on the math test. In 2001 Grant was recognized as national Title I Distinguished School.

Principal Steve Indgjerd credits quality teachers as making the most difference. As a team, Grant Elementary staff saw where to improve, and they did all the right things to achieve success.

Location

Larson Heights Elementary (K-5)
700 Lindberg Lane
Moses Lake, WA 98837

Contact

Loren Fitting, Principal
Phone: (509) 766-2655
E-mail: lfitting@mlsd.wednet.edu
Web site: www.moseslakeschools.org/larsonheights/

Description:

Located on the former Larson Air Force Base in Moses Lake, Larson Heights is a K-5 school serving a diverse population of nearly 400 students. With 80 percent of its population qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, and a mobility rate that is consistently more than 40 percent, it is a challenging environment. That the school has been recognized as a national Title I Distinguished School, shows it has risen to the challenge.

Reform efforts began in earnest six years ago when Larson Heights decided to go schoolwide Title I. Three years into the schoolwide project, they applied for and received a CSRD grant. Because they were already well into a schoolwide reform process, the staff and administration felt it made more sense for them to choose a CSRD model that addressed their particular goals, rather than an entire-school model. The Instructional Team, made up of administrators, teachers, classified personnel, parents, and community members, had already developed four main goals for the school in the areas

of math, reading, parent involvement, and a safe school environment. After extensive research, and with 100 percent consensus from the staff, they decided to go with the Consortium On Reading Excellence (C.O.R.E.) model.

C.O.R.E. is only one part of the school's multi-faceted approach to school improvement. During the first three years of their schoolwide project, they focused primarily on implementing the Accelerated Reader Program, and worked with specialist, Dr. Nancy Johnson, on developing a writing and portfolio program for the entire school. During this time, the entire staff also did a year of math inservice training and went to the state math conference together. That was only the beginning.

Utilizing his expertise in grant writing, Principal Loren Fitting was able to land a series of grants that allowed the school to address key elements identified in their ongoing needs assessment process. A Washington Reading Corps grant allowed them to bring in two AmeriCorps volunteers and a VISTA volunteer coordinator, and to set up tutor programs with the local high school and community college. The school was able to obtain three separate grants in the area of technology: a Gates Foundation Grant, a TELDEC Grant, and a Washington Software Grant (which helped set up an after-school ESL tutoring program). Add to this a Safe & Civil Schools Grant, a Writing Corner Grant, a District Benchmark Grant, and a recent Goals 2000 Grant for peer coaching, and you begin to understand the wide variety of sources the school has tapped to help meet its goals.

The grants have helped put full-time educational assistants in every primary classroom in the school. With 21 educational assistants in the building, along with a host of parent

and community volunteers, teachers have a lot of help. They also have a lot of technology at their disposal, including a new computer lab, computers in every classroom, Elmo projectors, a digital camera, and a camcorder. The library is also well stocked, and there are leveled books in each classroom and in the tutoring room.

Parent and community involvement has also benefited from grant money. With the help of a local grant, they are able to bus high school students to the school to tutor for one period a day. They also have partnered with Big Bend Community College to serve ESL students in an after-school, Parents as Instructional Partners (P.I.P.), program. Parent Activity Nights, with drawings for free prizes, and free book giveaways at Books for Kids/First Book events have been popular and helped overcome parent resistance. As Title I Coordinator Judy Dagnon put it: "Parents in low-income areas are often wary of schools and see them as part of the 'system' from which they have been disenfranchised. We work hard to overcome that and to make them feel like a vital part of the school."

With so many good things going on already, the school is careful to research and implement only those programs that address a specific need and work with their existing plan. One example is the Open Court K–2 Phonics program, which complemented the Accelerated Reader program already in place. C.O.R.E's team of experts worked with the entire Larson Heights staff (teachers and educational assistants) during the first year of training, which brought unity and consistency to the primary grades.

At Larson Heights, it's not just the main staff that receives extensive training. As Fitting notes: "We don't call our assistants 'paraprofessionals' here, because we really consider

them to be fully professional teachers. Our educational assistants frequently get nominated by the kids for Teacher of the Month, because the kids don't think of them as any different from the teachers." Dagnon also emphasizes the importance of integrating regular staff and their assistants. "You'll rarely find an EA just standing at a copier here,' she says. "We keep them in the classroom, working with the kids." To that end, there is inservice training once a month, specifically for the educational assistants.

This emphasis on professional development is one of the keys to Larson Heights' success. By bringing in substitutes, and by meeting with two grade levels for assembly-style presentations on most Friday afternoons, Fitting frees up the staff of each grade level for a half-day each month. While staff are involved in grade-level planning, development, and training, the principal reviews important topics, brings in guest speakers from the community, and coordinates follow-up activities for students. This level of commitment by a principal is truly extraordinary, and is obviously appreciated by his staff.

It is this spirit of collaboration and mutual respect that Fitting credits for the success of the school. "The strength of this building has been the staff buy-in," he says. "From the beginning we've had 100 percent buy-in on all the programs that we've looked at implementing. We set our goals together and we do our needs assessments together and we come to a consensus. It's really like a family around here." As a result, staff turnover has been nearly nonexistent. "We've got a lot of people who want to transfer in," says Dagnon, "and none who want to transfer out. A real measure of our success is that people want to come here. We've become a model for the district."

Location

Afton Elementary School (K-6)
175 E. 4th Ave.
P.O. Box 8002
Afton, WY 83110

Contact

Alan Allred, Principal
Phone: (307) 885-8002
E-mail: aallred@silverstar.com

Description

Afton Elementary is a small, rural school with a big reputation. A K-6, targeted assistance Title I school with fewer than 400 students, Afton is known within the state for taking risks and piloting new programs. And for getting amazing results. During the 1993-1994 school year, Afton was part of a districtwide audit conducted by Idaho State University. The audit showed that students were doing well in math, but lagging behind in reading. As a result, raising the reading performance of all students became the main school reform goal at Afton. The solutions came from research.

According to Principal Alan Allred, "We don't do anything that isn't research-based." Beginning with the question, "What can we do differently to help our students?" Allred and his staff studied a variety of interventions over a two-year period, and came up with several different, but connected, strategies.

One answer was the "push-in" model for students in special education and Title I, and the "full-inclusion" model for more

seriously disabled students. By "pushing-in" these students, rather than pulling them out of the main classroom, Allred hoped to foster greater collaboration between the entire staff and student body.

The change was gradual, but persistent. When a new special education teacher came to the school about the same time the reform process started, Allred asked her to start with the push-in model. According to both teacher and principal, he shared the research with her, offered suggestions and support, and generally said, "Go ahead and make it work."

Allred admits that change can be more difficult for established staff members. When they initiated the new program in the 1994–1995 school year, the principal sat down with each teacher one-on-one during planning time and explained to the more reluctant that there was no choice—they were making the changes for the kids. He also emphasized to each teacher that student performance was a schoolwide concern, one with implications that went beyond any single school year or testing period. "You stand on the shoulders of the teachers before you," Allred says.

Although the full-inclusion process was painful at first, staff members say, it is going smoothly now. Not perfect, always changing, but definitely working. Having paraeducators and special education and Title I teachers all working within the same classroom setting has helped create what Allred calls "a culture of unity" at Afton. Collaboration has become so strong at the school that, as one staff member pointed out, "It's difficult to identify who are the teachers and who are the aides." The result has not been confusion, but higher student performance.

A second school reform strategy came about through the school's media center staff. The Accelerated Reader program had been shown to improve student reading performance in a wide variety of schools throughout the Northwest. At Afton, Accelerated Reader was first introduced as a self-contained library program. Teachers soon became interested and decided to look into Reading Renaissance, the full-classroom program of which Accelerated Reader is a part. With full support from the principal, both in the acceptance of new ideas and the willingness to reallocate resources, the staff was eventually able to implement Reading Renaissance schoolwide. The success of the program is another testament to the open exchange of ideas between the entire staff and the principal at Afton, and their willingness to take risks.

A third strategy started in 1997, with an increased emphasis on phonics in grades K–2. This has recently been supplemented by the kindergarten's discovery of the SRA Reading Masteries program, a systematic early phonics program based on 20 years of research. The teachers were initially skeptical, due to the scripted nature of the program, but in true Afton spirit, and with an eye toward the research, they were willing to give it a try. They began piloting it in the past year and teachers are already reporting astounding success for all their students. Skepticism toward the program has given way to enthusiasm. "You couldn't pry it out of their hands with a crowbar," Allred says. The program now extends into the first grade, providing the consistency and collaboration so prevalent at Afton.

Another key factor in Afton's success has been the increase in parent and community involvement. A small, agriculture-based town, Afton is a close-knit community that takes great

pride in its schools. Afton Elementary has made every effort to tap into that spirit, encouraging parents to volunteer at the school and to attend programs during the day and the evening. Parents are involved in the school governance team and the PTO. They are also involved in committees focusing on school improvement, staff development, facilities, at-risk/gifted students, and school climate. Volunteers have been recruited to help with the improvement of reading performance. The community helps fund a variety of programs within the school. As Allred notes, "Even though most of the parents work, there is a great deal of support both at school and at home."

Professional development has also been a critical strategy in Afton's success. Much of the school's staff development centers on teachers planning with their grade level, as a staff, and with their instructional support teams, as well as collaborating to implement the "full inclusion" process. There are also inservice times scheduled for late-start each month for two hours, two full days before school starts, and two additional days during the year. In the past, inservice time was focused primarily on math, but recently it has shifted to the reading programs and the use of new technology resources. In addition, each teacher in grades 1-6 has 40 minutes a day of preparation time while students are in music, library, and/or P.E.

The importance that Afton places on research and new ideas is also reflected in the many conferences school staff members have attended. Teacher/staff teams frequently go as small groups to see other schools in the state, as well as to conferences such as the Nashville Accelerated Reader Conference, the National Title I Conference, the International Reading Conference, and National Science and Math confer-

ences held in the Northwest region. They also attend technology inservice sessions in Wyoming on a regular basis.

The use of technology has played a critical role in Afton's success. The Computer Curriculum Corporation's "SuccessMaker" software program is used in the library's computer lab, and according to Allred, "is a very important piece in the overall strategy for filling in the gaps of students that might otherwise have been missed." CCC came to the school and worked with each staff member one-on-one.

In addition, each classroom has at least one Macintosh, and there are several more in the media center. The Macs are used, among other activities, for the administration of comprehension tests, an important part of the Accelerated Reader program. The entire staff also uses the PowerSchool program to keep track of students. It's clear that the staff and administration at Afton are as willing to try new technologies to help their students as they are to try new ideas.

One of the most important factors in Afton's remarkable success has been the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for every student in the school. This insistence on an individualized approach is consistent, Allred says, with the full-inclusion model. Every student is treated equally within the classroom, but every student is also treated as an individual with specific needs. Without the parent and community involvement at the school, Allred notes, this individualized approach would be much harder to carry out.

Allred also draws attention to both the state and district support of the school's coordination of funds. Afton takes the idea of reallocation of resources "to the limit," by combining

Title I, special education, district, and school site funds in a variety of ways, to support everything from instructional programs, to professional development, to books and other materials. The school also takes advantage of outside funding as much as possible, as evidenced by a recent Extended Learning grant to support students after school.

The success at Afton is apparent on many levels: the percentage of students reading at or above grade level has increased from 62 to 78 percent; the media center's book circulation has doubled; 47 percent of the school's Title I students place out of the program due to increased achievement. On a recent CTBS/McGraw-Hill National Education Report, Afton's third- and sixth-graders showed scores "significantly above average" in nearly every category and demographic. Afton was also the first school in Wyoming to receive the Reading Renaissance Model School Award, and Allred was named a 2000 National Distinguished Principal by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).

While Afton has not implemented a specific comprehensive school reform model, or received any additional money, the school has developed its own schoolwide plan that shares many characteristics with those models. The unofficial motto, "Comfort the Disturbed, Disturb the Comfortable," gives some indication of the independent spirit that drives the school reform process. And others are starting to take notice. As Allred says: "Success breeds success. At first, Afton teachers were visiting other schools around the state and region, now other schools are coming to Afton to see what we are doing." What they are seeing is a small school with a big heart, doing a lot of things right.

Location

Corlett Elementary (K-3)
600 W. 22nd
Cheyenne, WY 82001

Contact

Stuart Nelson, Principal
Phone: (307) 771-2420
E-mail: NelsonS@Laramie1.k12.wy.us
Web site: www.laramie1.k12.wy.us/schools/corlett.htm

Description:

Four years ago, Corlett Elementary Principal Stuart Nelson took a good look around his school and decided the time was right for a change. In the five years he had been at the school, he had tried to make changes, including taking his Title I program schoolwide, but there were still some major problems. Student performance and staff morale both seemed to be as low as when he started. The 60-year-old building in central Cheyenne seemed to have a stigma attached to it. No one seemed to want to talk. No one wanted to take field trips. Teachers and families wanted out of the school. With 40 percent or more of the families coming from the local Air Force base, there was a high mobility rate that seemed to result in a fatalistic attitude—how much can we do with these kids when they move through so quickly?

With four different superintendents in Nelson's first five years at the school, the administration seemed almost as mobile as the students. It was hard to get consistent support for changes. But Nelson felt that the newest administrative

change didn't have to mean more of the same. The school-wide project had put some good things in place. They just needed one more big push.

Nelson sat down with his entire staff and asked them what they thought was the single most important area that needed help. Math and reading were both mentioned, and the consensus was that improving reading skills had to come first. They set that single goal and went looking for answers. Nelson, along with the other Title I principals in the district, had already been researching a wide variety of reading intervention programs. Corlett decided to go with a relatively new program, the Collaborative Literacy Initiative Project (CLIP), which had shown great results in Tempe, Arizona. Based on many years of study by literacy expert Marie Clay, CLIP is designed for first-graders. As a K–2 school with a high mobility rate, Corlett needed a program that brought kids up to level early and quickly. CLIP seemed like a good match. The first year, Nelson sent two teachers through CLIP training. At the end of the second year, five more were trained.

Several years before, Nelson had read an article in *Principal* magazine about "thinking outside the box" to bring change. Ever since, he had been thinking about how to alter the instructional schedule at his school to lower class size and find more staff planning time. Although rescheduling was not, at first, a popular idea at the school, he decided the implementation of CLIP was a good time to try it.

By arranging to have teaching specialists for art, music, and P.E. all come in the afternoon (going to another school in the morning), taking greater advantage of the educational assistants, and moving to block scheduling, Nelson was able to

achieve the two goals at once. First, this allowed each grade level team 30 minutes of planning time every day. Second, they were able to set aside 40 minutes of reading time every day with a class size of only seven.

Every 40-minute session during the reading block, one-third of each class stays with the teacher. Another third works at the computer lab using the Jostens program to work on specific reading skills. The final third works on writing, either at the writing-to-read lab, or at the library writing center. At the end of each day, every student has spent 40 minutes at each station, including a very focused session with his or her teacher in a class of only seven students. At first, Nelson says, the teachers were resistant to rescheduling, but after seeing the results and how it frees them up, they would never go back.

These changes started to bring immediate results, but there were still problems. The CLIP program was working wonders, but was limited to the first grade. The second-grade students in the bottom quartile needed more help getting up to level. After more research into reading programs that would augment the CLIP program, Corlett decided to follow the lead of the Tempe School District and the suggestion of CLIP and implement a Guiding Reading program for every grade. The entire staff went through a two-day training, given by a CLIP trainer, combining the Guided Reading techniques with CLIP lessons and terminology. Eventually, they also added NWREL's Six-Trait Reading method to their repertoire. With the whole school now using the same strategies and common language, things really began to take off.

Now into their fourth year with these changes, the results have been dramatic. Nearly every child at Corlett is now at

or above grade level in reading. But the changes are deeper than that. By building off their success in reading performance, the entire school has seen a turnaround. The increased planning time, and the meaningful use of educational assistants and volunteers, has led to vastly improved staff satisfaction. The improved reading performance led the staff to the idea of integrating reading, and similar strategies of teaching, across the entire curriculum. As a result, math, social studies, and science have all shown improvement.

Another big change has been parent and community involvement. As part of the implementation of new programs and scheduling changes, the school was determined to bring parents into the process. After the first year, eight low-performing students had learned to read. "The parents of those eight children," Nelson says, "became our biggest supporters the second year."

Before the changes began, teachers were defensive about the low performance levels at the school, and there was a subtle feeling of discouragement toward parent visits and involvement. The success of the reading program created the opposite effect. Staff members felt proud of their accomplishments and wanted to share their excitement. Building off this, the school pushed forward with more parent-oriented activities. Every month, there is now a social event connected to an education program. Teachers and students alike have worked to show the parents some of the specifics of the CLIP program, Guided Reading, and the Six Traits of Reading method, as well as many other instructional programs at the school. Field trips are now common and encouraged, the PTO is stronger than ever, and community involvement, through contributions, partnerships, and

volunteers, has increased dramatically. "When the school is willing to admit mistakes," Nelson say, "and to genuinely seek input from parents and community, only then do you gain that much-needed community buy-in."

The turnaround at Corlett has been remarkable and is only getting stronger. The increased use of technology has helped implement programs more effectively, including frequent assessments that offer kids the individual help they need, when they need it. Running Records of reading skills, for instance, are given on a daily basis to at least one student, and teachers submit monthly and quarterly reports to the principal. The majority of school funds continue to be focused on specific goals, such as the purchase of leveled books, which build off past successes in a logical way. The school integrates Title I, II, VI, and VIB special education funds toward resources that improve the entire school, with teachers playing an important role in how the money is spent. With only eight full-time teachers, collaboration and teamwork are a definite strength at Corlett. Staff meetings are generally held during noontime, and both parents and classified staff are encouraged to attend and give their input.

The biggest outcome of the reform process at Corlett, Nelson says, is that "the stigma of the '60-year-old school in downtown Cheyenne' has been taken away." The surest sign is the pressure now coming from the district office and other schools for training, tours, and information. "There's always someone at the school now, observing," he says. That is perhaps the biggest testament to the perseverance and commitment at Corlett Elementary.

COMMON STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Several strategies emerge from these stories of school reform efforts. While space does not allow us to discuss every approach, we summarize seven general strategies with supportive findings from the school reform literature. For a more detailed discussion of these seven strategies, please refer to resources cited in the Resources and References sections.

1. Creating a Clear, Shared Vision With Attainable Goals

Nearly every school we profiled cited a clear vision as central to its success. This is consistent with previous research on high-performing learning communities. Berman and Chambliss (2000) report that such schools have a shared vision of excellence and equity. Successful school reform relies on establishing clear, measurable goals and benchmarks for achieving those goals (Hansel, 2001). Schools that stick with their vision, despite setbacks, have the quality of persistence that contributes to their long-term success (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

Based on the experiences of the schools we profiled, we believe an effective vision is shared and developed by the entire school community; has attainable goals; and is realized through sustained, comprehensive improvement efforts.

Building Consensus

In many of these schools, a new principal came into a school that was facing a variety of challenges, such as low staff morale, low test scores, or a high incidence of violence. The

principal and staff together conducted a needs assessment and identified a mission with clearly identified goals on which the staff could focus immediate attention. Most of the schools listed specific goals in their schoolwide improvement plans, with methods of evaluating progress toward those goals.

In order for a school improvement plan to work as a strategy for success, everything a school does must contribute to accomplishing the goals. Indeed, researchers have found that consensus about the need for reform is a necessary precondition of comprehensive school improvement (Berman & Chambliss, 2000).

At Corlett, for example, the principal and faculty reached consensus on improving students' reading skills as the first step in reform. Similarly, at Larson Heights, the staff has shown "100 percent buy-in" on reform efforts. Said Principal Loren Fitting, "We set out goals together, and we do our needs assessments together, and we come to a consensus."

Attaining Goals

Targeting and attaining visible goals shows students, parents, teachers, and other members of the school community that change is possible; early success thus becomes the cornerstone of future success (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

As Corlett's principal advised: "Pick one thing and get it right, then build off your successes. Don't quit." Grant did a needs assessment, realized its program goals were inconsistent, and identified seven priority goals for improvement. At several of the schools, such as Afton and Pablo, increasing student achievement in reading was the most important

schoolwide goal. All resources were put into achieving this goal. At Afton, several different but connected strategies, such as the "push-in" model for Title I and special education students and implementing a phonics program for K–2 students all focused on reading achievement.

Comprehensive Approach

All the schools in this study have engaged in comprehensive reform efforts to improve academic achievement. Comprehensive school reform is a systematic approach to schoolwide improvement that incorporates every aspect of a school, from curriculum and instruction to school management (Hansel, 2001).

Five of the 12 schools have used Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) grants and implemented comprehensive school models. At Glacier Valley, which used the Annenberg Institute School Reform model, staff members indicated that the model helped them work together toward increasing accountability, engaging the public, and expanding staff capacity. Some models serve as a framework for a school's improvement efforts, while others focus on improvement in a specific content area. Models play only a part of the overall strategy of school reform. Larson Heights and Corlett, for example, had already embarked on schoolwide reform before introducing models specifically focusing on reading skills.

More significant than the use of a particular reform model is the strategy of taking a comprehensive approach to school reform. All these schools have developed a schoolwide planning process of assessing needs, setting goals, examining all data, implementing plans, and aligning all components to

reach the ultimate goal of student success. At each site, the whole staff is now using a common language and best practices, and are integrating and aligning curriculum and assessment for working together toward the same purpose, creating a learning environment that is coherent across the grade spans.

2. Creating a Learning Community

Research has shown that high-performing, high-poverty schools function as communities of learners (Berman & Chambliss, 2000). These are places where students are engaged by challenging instruction, typically aligned with state content and performance standards (Hansel, 2001; Johnson & Asera, 1999). Teachers and other staff members are afforded learning opportunities to continue developing the skills and knowledge necessary to implement reforms (Hansel, 2001).

Although each school uses a variety of strategies to create learning communities, they all set learning goals for students; increase opportunities for professional development; and foster a collaborative learning environment.

Setting Learning Goals

Setting measurable goals and benchmarks for student learning is an important part of student success at the schools we profiled. Schools that successfully serve diverse populations not only set high expectations for all learners, but also provide support to help students meet those expectations regardless of family background or English language proficiency (HPLC Project, 2001).

Hoonah aligned its curriculum with student goals and benchmarks based on the Alaska state content standards and benchmarks but modified it to fit the needs of the culturally diverse student population. At Taft, before schoolwide reform, there were no clear goals or benchmarks. Establishing these goals and benchmarks was one of the first things the principal did in the reform process. Sacajawea staff members have created reading, writing, and mathematics plans to ensure that all staff members are following the same guidelines. At Portsmouth, the school year was reorganized into quarters, with the first three focused on bringing students up to grade level on state standards, and the last quarter used to evaluate that year's results, and to set new goals for the following year. As a result, they are able to head into each new school year with clearly defined, data-based goals already in focus.

Providing for Professional Development

Providing the resources for adequate staff development is essential if the staff is to understand the process and be trained in school reform strategies. It is also important for staff members to have adequate time to assess their needs, investigate programs, and continue dialogue with each other. Larson Heights and Bryant are just two examples of schools we profiled that provide ongoing inservice training for the entire instructional staff, including educational assistants. The Taft principal provides the opportunity for staff members to share best practices and research through a monthly "Breakfast Club," as well as ongoing professional development in research-based practices.

Fostering Collaboration

High-performing learning communities involve the whole school staff in the reform process, including decisionmaking.

In addition, these schools create opportunities for staff collaboration, cohesion, sharing, and communication. For successful reform, genuine staff involvement and ongoing support from staff are necessary (Hansel, 2001).

The principals at the schools we profiled engaged the staff in every step of the process, from conducting needs assessments to choosing a strategy or model to fully training them in the strategies or model, and in the evaluation process. This participatory process has enhanced the leadership capacity of the staffs, given them a sense of their own responsibility in the process, and created a true learning community. At Grant, for example, the principal and staff developed a collaborative process to determine how decisions would be made. A 75 percent majority vote is required to adopt any new approach. At Afton, a staff member mentioned that collaboration has become so strong that it is hard to distinguish teachers from the paraeducators.

3. Creating a Positive, Supportive, and Safe School Culture

It is obvious from the profiles that all these schools have created a positive, safe school culture. A recent NWREL case study of two high-poverty, low-performing schools (Aldersebaes, Potter, & Hamilton, 2000) indicated a constant theme: "schools need to prepare for change by first creating a positive, supportive environment of respect and trust" (p. 2). A necessary component to becoming a high-performing school is creating an academic learning environment in which students are empowered by their "positive connection to others and by their own academic success" (Brookover, Erickson, & McEvoy, 1996). Staff morale and involvement is part of this positive school culture.

Northwest schools have used a variety of strategies to make their school culture safer and more positive, including increased cultural congruence, use of positive discipline, and celebrations of success.

Cultural Congruence

Research has shown that culturally congruent teaching methods and curriculum contribute to improved learning and outcomes, especially for bilingual and American Indian students (Reyhner, 1992; Stokes, 1997; Tannenbaum, 1996). This includes incorporation of culture and native language, authentic and cooperative learning, integrated curricula, and using alternative assessments. In many of these culturally and linguistically diverse schools, a culturally congruent curriculum is a major factor in student success. At Hoonah and Pablo, culture has been fully incorporated into the curriculum, including teaching the native language, literature, art, and music. Hoonah's school counselor reports that as a result, there is less absenteeism and tardiness, and children come to school excited to learn. Hoonah and other schools have implemented portfolio and performance-based assessments in addition to standardized assessments.

Positive Discipline

Other schools have developed a positive, safe school culture by incorporating strategies that teach the children to be contributing members of their school community. Grant has created a variety of clubs to engage students in positive activities. At Lake Labish, a schoolwide awards assembly is held each month, celebrating students who have shown exceptionally good citizenship.

Celebrating Success

Part of creating a positive school culture is the celebration of success. Pablo celebrates attendance successes with parties, rewards, and banners. At Glacier Valley and Bryant, students put on community performances to demonstrate and celebrate what they have accomplished. At Hoonah, the spring potlatch is a community celebration where the students celebrate and demonstrate all they have learned.

4. Providing Effective, Collaborative Leadership

Research on effective schools and comprehensive school reform consistently indicates the principal is a key factor in the successful implementation of all stages of the reform process. Effective leadership is critical to effective schools (Housman, 2001; Levine & Lezotte, 1995). Researchers have described effective school leaders as visible, accessible, and knowledgeable about instruction (Cotton, in press).

While traditional theories of leadership focus on individual attributes, researchers and practitioners involved in recent school reform efforts propose that the "leader's ability to construct leadership as a shared responsibility" is more important. Building capacity for leadership within the staff is crucial to long-term sustainability (Housman, 2001, p. 6). When principals empower their staffs by sharing leadership and decisionmaking, everyone benefits—including students (Cotton, in press).

Schools we profiled showed evidence of effective leadership, with principals exhibiting strong individual management skills and sharing leadership collaboratively.

Effective, Knowledgeable Principals

Principals of successful schools play a central role in school reform, shaping everything from school climate to classroom practices. Staff members at Glacier Valley, for example, commended the principal for her ability to mentor, encourage, and model new educational processes. At Taft, the principal led the way to creating a responsible and respectful climate for students and staff, and also has coached teachers to improve teaching practices. Corlett's principal used his leadership skills to overcome staff resistance to rescheduling the school day.

Collaborative Leadership

The principals of the schools we profiled are committed to providing the support, training, and resources necessary for their staff members to become leaders. Staff at Glacier Valley and Hoonah indicated that the principal continues to engage the staff in the school improvement process, so that they are developing ownership of the process, rather than reform being a top-down process. At Taft, teachers are provided training and support to develop their leadership skills. Teachers attend conferences, then bring their knowledge back to share with colleagues. At Sacajawea, teachers have taken ownership and initiative by working together to develop Individual Reading Plans and look at assessment data, and by using data to adapt their lessons to fit the needs of the students.

5. Making Effective Use of Resources

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of providing adequate resources to support teachers in school reform efforts (Johnson & Asera, 1999). In comprehensive school

reform, an effective resource allocation plan ties every resource into supporting the improvement plan (Hansel, 2001).

Once the schools we profiled had agreed on a vision for school reform, they utilized all resources available to make the vision happen. Guided by effective principals (see also Strategy 4), these schools demonstrated creative strategies for using time, staff, materials, facilities, and funds. They sought help from external sources, when needed, to implement reform models or build staff capacity. They used technology to support learning, assessment, and evaluation.

Stretching Resources

Many of the schools we profiled applied for grants and used existing resources—including time and personnel—in non-traditional and creative ways.

These schools' experiences show that creative use of resources involves more than just money. It also involves:

- **Time** (such as rescheduling, restructuring of the class day, to allow for ongoing professional development or focus on a particular instructional program). Lake Labish, for example, uses 90-minute reading blocks to create mixed-age ability groups, as well as additional time for tutoring for students who are a grade or more behind. Sacajawea has created extended learning times, including full-day kindergarten, to help students bring their skills to grade level.
- **Class size** (using all resources, including paraeducators, to reduce class size for all or part of the school day). Corlett's principal combined resources to reduce class size to seven students at certain times of the day.
- **Staff** (making use of all staff—including paraeducators, program facilitators, other support staff, Title I teachers, spe-

cial education specialists, etc.—to accomplish reform goals). Afton combines funds from different sources to stretch staffing resources. Larson Heights integrates certified teaching staff and assistants, and includes all classroom staff in professional development activities.

Outside Support

Recent studies on schoolwide improvement note the importance of assistance by external providers, such as school districts, regional educational laboratories, comprehensive assistance centers, model developers, or state Title I staff (Hansel, 2001). The external assistance providers offer a different perspective on the reform process—another pair of eyes—as well as expertise and support in implementing research-based strategies, conducting evaluations, and evaluating and using data.

The profiled schools report that assistance such as site visits by model developers, external evaluators, and regional assistance centers have been a "shot in the arm" for maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm for reform. What has really made the difference, however, is the ongoing, sustained support by either professional facilitators or technical assistance providers who have worked consistently with the school on a long-term basis. Lake Labish, for example, has a half-time facilitator on site, and supplements that steady support with early release times and professional development days for additional training. Bryant brought in a model facilitator to work with the staff to develop unified goals and strategies. Pablo has been strongly supported and assisted by Title I staff at Montana's Office of Public Instruction as well as a professional facilitator. Glacier Valley has had much support from the Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center.

Using Technology

Many of the schools profiled report that technology has helped by making progress assessment data readily accessible. Pablo's principal says that being able to show staff, parents, and students data regularly and frequently has helped keep their goal in the forefront and progress toward it visible. (See also Strategy 6.)

Several of the schools, such as Afton, Grant, and Hoonah, have used technology to enrich hands-on activities, create visual projects, and enhance reading and writing skills. Many of the schools have K–12 technology curriculum aligned with school standards.

6. Using Data To Drive Reform

Effective use of data is key to assessing needs and developing reform processes and strategies that meet those needs (Housman, 2001; USDOE, 2000). To be successful in school improvement, the focus should be narrowed to measurable goals, and easily accessible data should be reviewed (Schmoker, 1999). NWREL's *Assessment Matrix for Classroom Instruction* (Hamilton & Shoemaker, 2000) describes the importance of interpreting data to set goals and to continuously evaluate strategies by examining the data.

Schools profiled in the Northwest region have used data in connection with a variety of strategies, including assessing needs and student progress, and evaluating ongoing results to fine-tune reform efforts.

Assessing Needs

The schools we profiled have collected, disaggregated, and evaluated their data to determine what goals to set for school improvement. Looking at the data in this way was quite revealing to the staff, many of whom had never seen the data before. At Glacier Valley, after they looked at the disaggregated data, discouraged teachers became more positive that they could achieve measurable goals. Pablo looked at student achievement, student climate, and other data, and "recognized we were not meeting student needs satisfactorily," according to Principal Andrea Johnson. The data help the school set goals of reducing violent incidents and increasing student achievement.

Assessing Progress

Data are continuously used to evaluate student progress. Most schools use a variety of measures to assess student progress, including alternative assessments such as electronic portfolios. Lake Labish students are evaluated every eight weeks in reading and grouped according to ability levels. Sacajawea uses regular reading assessments, and uses Running Records to determine which students need individual learning plans. At Portsmouth, assessment data are used throughout the school year to measure progress toward state standards and to make curriculum changes accordingly. At Taft, the principal has encouraged teachers to use assessment and other data to help their instruction be more effective.

Evaluating Results

Evaluation is critical for the success of comprehensive school reform efforts. Evaluation informs staff what is and isn't working and guides decisions about program adjust-

ments and improvements (Yap, Aldersebaes, Railsback, Shaughnessey, & Speth, 2000). A well-developed evaluation plan will provide detailed student achievement data that show "when (e.g., in what grades); where (e.g., in which classrooms or with which teachers); and with whom (e.g., in which groups of children or types of students) student increases have been made" (Hansel, 2001, p. 51).

Most schools we profiled have developed evaluation plans and strategies for their school improvement plans, as well as evaluation strategies to measure student progress. The schools that implement comprehensive school reform models must include evaluation by the external provider as well as multiple assessments and strategies to evaluate student progress. Pablo will be hosting a "building leadership academy" with training from the model providers to look at the data and set schoolwide goals from where achievement is now. Schools that didn't use models also have evaluation components written into their schoolwide plans and goals. For example, Hoonah recently implemented a software program to enhance reading skills that will be evaluated to see if it has affected student achievement.

7. Involving Parents and Community

A wealth of research during the last several decades has shown that parent involvement is related to student achievement, school performance, and student behavior (Davis, 2000; Hansel, 2001; Novick, 1999). Getting the community involved and invested in the school and creating school-community collaborations have been factors, as well (Carlsmith & Railsback, 2001; Davis, 2000; Hansel, 2001).

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education has developed keys to successful parent involvement including assessing family needs; hiring and training a parent/family liaison to coordinate family activities and communications, sensitive to the needs of families, especially ethnically and linguistically diverse families; developing multiple outreach programs; recognizing the community's ethnic or cultural resources in generating family involvement; scheduling events to reach diverse family groups; and continually evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies (cited in Hansel, 2001).

Involving the parents and community in the ways mentioned above has made a difference at the schools we profiled. All have involved parents and community members in their school improvement planning process. Additional strategies to involve parents and the community have proven effective. Grant's kindergarten teachers visit with each new student's family before classes begin. Lake Labish employs a full-time, bilingual school-community outreach coordinator and involves more parents through the Family Support Team. Bryant's bookmobile has been a huge community outreach success, averaging 50 books checked out per trip.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

In the previous section, we summarized the overall strategies used by high-poverty schools in their reform process. While the day-to-day work of comprehensive school reform takes place at the building level, policymakers also play an important role in encouraging and supporting school improvement.

Closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their peers is emerging as a national education goal. To stay abreast of policy changes at the federal level, including resources for schools engaging in comprehensive reform, readers can consult the Web site of the U.S. Department of Education (www.ed.gov).

At the state level, the standards and accountability movement supports the school reform strategy of setting high expectations for all learners. Previous research has concluded that successful high-poverty schools exceed the minimum expectations of their states and districts. Policymakers should consider ways to encourage schools to exceed minimum progress and focus on helping students achieve exemplary academic results (Johnson & Asera, 1999). In this context, accountability policies can frame and focus the responsibility felt by educators (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

Schools that have succeeded in reform efforts make good use of resources and have the flexibility to use time and staff to best meet students' needs. State and district policymakers can support school reform by making sure schools are adequately funded, and also allowing decisionmaking to happen at the school level. For example, rather than mandating

that all staff members attend inservice training workshops, a district can allow schools to determine how to use their staff time and funding for professional development that will advance reform goals. Schools tackling comprehensive school reform need to be able to tie all resources—federal, state, local, and private—into supporting their improvement plan (Hansel, 2001).

District and state education agencies also can provide local schools with expertise and technical assistance in such areas as instructional improvement, data analysis, and evaluation. Similarly, districts are in a position to help school principals deepen their skills for fostering collaboration and providing instructional leadership.

Parental and community involvement is very important for school reform. Policymakers can take steps to encourage public engagement, such as providing funding for a parent volunteer coordinator or ensuring that community members participate in needs assessments. Finally, policymakers need to keep all stakeholders informed about ongoing efforts to improve results for students.

CONCLUSION

We have outlined the main strategies that our profiled schools have in common. While specifics of reform will vary from site to site, research and case studies show that reform is an ongoing process of determining goals and benchmarks by conducting needs assessments, using data to guide decisionmaking, aligning goals for student performance with state and local standards, and evaluating results to fine-tune reform strategies.

Schools embarking on reform would be wise to involve everyone—staff, parents, and community members—from the beginning in order to create support and buy-in for school reform. Successful, comprehensive school reform engages staff members as leaders in the school change process. These schools provide staff members with the appropriate resources, professional development training, and sufficient time to support change, share knowledge, collaborate with peers, and develop new skills. Shared decisionmaking within an atmosphere of respect and trust is another hallmark of successful schools. School leaders play a critical role in guiding their schools through reform. Districts can support school reform by investing in professional development of principals.

These Northwest schools are just some of the many examples of Title I schools that have achieved success. In these schools, administrators, teachers, paraeducators, parents, community members, and students all work together to create a collaborative culture of continuous learning and improvement. When school reform succeeds, it's a victory the entire community can celebrate.

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REVIEW

Jerian Abel, Inge Aldersebaes, Kathleen Cotton, Diane Dorfman, Patricia Cooney Nida, Paul Palm, Tim Speth, and Janice Wright, NWREL staff

Marsha Davis, Montana Office of Public Instruction
Brett Dillingham, Alaska Comprehensive Regional Assistance Center
Hugh Burkett, Kathy Fuller, and Holly Martinez, U.S. Department of Education

NWREL's Northwest Teacher Panel 2001 participants:
Olga Acuña, Century High School, Hillsboro, Oregon
Norma Barber, Ukiah School District, Ukiah, Oregon
Sally Brownfield, Hood Canal School District #404, Shelton, Washington
Steven Jacquier, Southwest Region School District, Togiak, Alaska
Eileen Thornburgh, Silver Sage Elementary School, Boise, Idaho
Patricia Truman, Palmer Junior/Middle School, Palmer, Alaska
Robin Zeal, Muldown Elementary School, Whitefish, Montana

EDITING

Eugenia Cooper Potter

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

Linda Fitch

PRODUCTION

Paula Surmann

DESIGN

Denise Crabtree

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